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## On VidCon, Harassment & Garbage Humans

Anita Sarkeesian — June 26, 2017

To kick off the Women Online panel at VidCon last Thursday, the moderator posed the question: Why do we still have to talk about the harassment of women? I replied, *“Because I think one of my biggest harassers is sitting in the front row.”* He showed up with several others; together, his group took up the two front rows at the panel. Their presence was plainly not, as one of them later said in an “apology” video he posted to Twitter, to “give us the chance we never gave them” and to “hear us out,” but was instead to intimidate me and put me on edge. They will no doubt plead innocent and act shocked at what they characterize as the outrageousness of such allegations. This, too, is part of their strategy: gaslighting, acting in a way intended to encourage me and their other targets to doubt ourselves and to wonder if all of this isn’t just in our heads. But to anyone who examines their patterns of behavior with clear eyes, the intentions of their actions are undeniably apparent.



Carl is a man who literally profits from harassing me and other women: he makes over \$5,000 a month on Patreon for creating YouTube videos that mock, insult and discredit myself and other women online, and he’s not alone. He is one of several YouTubers who profit from the cottage industry of online harassment and antifeminism; together, these people have millions of followers who are regularly encouraged by the videos and tweets of these individuals to harass me and other women who make videos daring to assert the basic humanity of women, people of color, trans folks, and members of other marginalized groups.

Because of the constant flood of threats and harassment I have received over the past five years simply for being a woman who argues for the basic humanity of women in a deeply misogynistic culture, I went for a very long time rarely participating in public conversations. Being a target of cybermob harassment is a traumatizing experience, though harassers seek to deny this; one tactic of theirs is to dismiss this very idea, to say that everyone online is treated the same, everyone online gets “called names” sometimes. In fact, there is simply no comparison between being occasionally mocked or insulted online as a male antifeminist who occupies a position of power in an overwhelmingly sexist, patriarchal culture, and being a woman who receives a never-ending torrent of abuse while fighting tooth and nail to create an online culture that is a little less misogynistic and a little more equitable.

**That is itself an act of harassment and intimidation.**

However, despite the torrent of harassment, I recently made a conscious decision to participate more regularly in panels and conversations at public events, because I wanted to engage with people who show up in good faith to listen to our ideas. But let me make something very clear: When you have a history of harassing someone for years, and you show up in the front row at their panel with a camera and an entourage, that is not an act of good faith, to put it mildly. That is itself an act of harassment and intimidation. He and his companions were doing this not just to me but to other women as well, women like Kat Blaque and Franchesca Ramsey, so that we all are aware at VidCon that this man who has harassed us and whose hundreds of thousands of followers have attacked us online for years is here, watching us. It’s a deliberate act to create an environment that feels hostile, to communicate to us that if and when we dare to show up in public to express the ideas that we express online, the harassment will follow us into the physical world as well.

Now, he and his followers are acting as if me publicly calling him a “garbage human” is the equivalent to what he has done to me. In truth, he and his followers cannot begin to imagine what it is to have to constantly beg for and fight for your basic humanity in a culture that fundamentally refuses to acknowledge it. He cannot imagine what it is to spend years and years being the target of floods of harassment and hate, and then to still go out there and keep fighting. The companion of his who made that apology video I referenced earlier also tweeted that women are “powerful” enough to “deal with things like workplace harassment to rape.” As if power is in accepting a culture in which women are second-class citizens, in which misogyny and workplace harassment and rape are the norm. Fuck that. I’ll never settle for that. You’re damn right I’m powerful. After everything I’ve been put through by Carl and other men just like him, I’m still powerful enough to go out there and try to change it.

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